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CIA director calls leaks worst threat to America

By Sally Ann Stewart
Staff Writer

Warning that the CIA must be protected from public scrutiny, Director Stansfield Turner said leaks of secret information undermine the effectiveness of the agency.

"Leaks are the most serious threat to American survival today," he said.

Turner, speaking yesterday at the last Palm Beach Round Table discussion at the Paramount Theatre, was joined by FBI director William Webster, and Marvin Stone, editor of U.S. News and World Report.

Turner, who has headed the CIA since March 1977, continued his drive for legislation to free the agency from the Freedom of Information Act. He also is pressing for legislation to allow prosecution of those who disclose foreign agents' names or identities.

Turner said he has asked Congress to cut the number of formal oversight committees from eight to two.

The two-hour round table, attended by about 1,000 persons, focused on relationship of press to the two intelligence agencies, the CIA and FBI.

Stone asked Turner if he had changed his mind about using newspaper foreign correspondents as CIA spies. At a convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors last week, Turner said he did not find the practice harmful.

The remark last week drew sharp criticism from newspaper editorial writers. The *New York Times* called Turner's remarks a "threat to (reporters') safety," and argued that reporters need to be independent seekers of truth.

Turner responded to Stone's question yesterday by saying the editorials had not swayed his opinion, although he said the CIA had not worked with reporters for at least four years.

Noting that there has "always been an exchange" of information between the media and the two agencies, Stone said, "All my colleagues feel it would have been better left unsaid."

Webster said that three people in the "media profession" currently are supplying information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation because "we believe we are entitled to that information."

Webster said the three informants had volunteered their information and the plan was approved by the U.S. Attorney General.